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The Vanier Institute of the Family
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Reflecting the
significance of
the family in
the development
of the individual
and the society

STATEMENT OF
THE VANIER INSTITUTE OF THE FAMILY
IN RESPONSE TO
NORTHERN FRONTIER, NORTHERN HOMELAND
The Report of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry



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In seeking to promote the well-being of Canadian families, the Vanier Institute of the Family is greatly encouraged by the approach taken by Mr. Justice Thomas Berger in his first Report on the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry (Volume 1, *Northern Frontier, Northern Homeland*).

The Vanier Institute commends Mr. Justice Berger for recognizing the importance of enlarging the criteria for public policy decision-making, and for adopting a questioning stance towards many of the assumptions upon which public policies have conventionally been based. He shows clearly the artificiality of the distinction between so-called economic concerns and social concerns. His Report demonstrates that a re-examination and re-perception of these concerns is necessary in order to avoid overlooking, and thereby further weakening, many family and community values.

A number of significant issues are addressed in the Report in a manner that closely parallels what the Institute has come to understand from its studies of the broader Canadian context. These concern such areas as familial lifestyles, the meanings of work for personal identity and a sense of community, the lifelong and all-pervasive nature of learning, and the close relationship of family, community, and economic patterns.

The Berger Report shows that the legitimate claims and aspirations of the Northern native people must be taken into full account and adequate time given for their proper consideration. All Canadians need to assess the significance of a pipeline and energy corridor with the clear understanding that what is at stake could be the destruction of a culture which has served the peoples of the North well for hundreds of years. We need to question seriously whether the industrial system of the South is suited to the conditions in the North.

Indeed, the Vanier Institute believes that we need to go yet further and ask how the industrial system we now have in the Canadian South can be changed in order to serve us better. It is evident, for example, that the energy derived from fossil fuels alone cannot be used to accelerate our industrial growth for even another generation. Appropriate technologies of an intermediate and more human scale need to be explored and developed. We may yet again come to respect the sun and the wind, and to understand ourselves as sons and daughters of the Earth.

The Berger Report reveals how family living patterns and cultural aspects of community living are integrally related to the nature of the working and economic life of Northern peoples. We fellow Canadians are told, in the words of the people themselves, of a style of living where even the land is seen and cared for as a member of the family. We are told of a wide network for sharing food gathered from the land and waters, of a deep respect and caring for the young, the old, the weak, the confused, and for those who simply are different. In other words, we are told of what the Vanier Institute refers to as a "familial society".

We see again the degree to which modern industrial perceptions have disintegrated modes of human activity and relationship into formal disciplines and technical specialties which tend to divide persons into "patients", "consumers", "students", "constituents" and the like. We begin to recognize, too, how our tools, which include everything from the hammer to a pipeline, shape us and our social ways of relating to one another.

A first step toward understanding the way of life of Canada's Northern native peoples is to recognize that all of the same basic life-sustaining activities that go on in the South also go on in the North. The primary difference is the informal and less technicized nature of these activities in the North. Native Northerners are engaged in economic activity just as much as employers and workers in the South. It is not accurate to say that they live in an "under-developed economy". They in fact have a highly developed economy but one of a different kind: one that has lasted 5,000 years or more and one that has stood them well in a harsh environment; one that takes into account both the integrity of persons, families and communities and the ecological limits of the natural milieu.

As Mr. Justice Berger illustrates, there exists an elaborate network for the exchange of country produce gleaned from extensive hunting, fishing and trapping. In the traditional culture which is still in evidence in the North, those unable to hunt, trap or fish for themselves receive food from their neighbours or relatives. Berger

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states: "The survival of the native economy has depended primarily on the native people's special relationship with the land. To native people, the land is more than just a source of food or cash: it is the permanent source not only of their physical, but also of their psychological well-being and of their identity as a people." The encroaching urbanized and industrialized way of life has served to undermine such a family-centred economy.

The Vanier Institute of the Family is concerned to make apparent the need to preserve and strengthen the native economy, for only in so doing can the positive human values of the native culture be retained. As Mr. Justice Berger points out, this does not mean that the native people are seeking to become a museum piece. Aspects of modern technology on a human scale, and adapted to cultures based upon small groups, are crucially important to the survival of the native economy. The Dene, Inuit and Metis are seeking to adapt to the modern world, but in ways that will not destroy their culture and that will not lead either to their assimilation into white society or to their relegation to the fringes of that society.

Reflecting this broad understanding, the nature of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry has been significantly different in its inquiring process from Commissions which have tended to rely largely upon formal, and thereby limited, "expert" evidence. Mr. Justice Berger has said, "I am convinced that the native people of the North told the inquiry their innermost concerns and their deepest fears." This was possible because both formal and informal hearings were set up as requested by Northern communities. The orientation was not to rule anything out of evidence arbitrarily.

The Vanier Institute strongly supports this approach to public-policy inquiry because it allows people to express and explain their own understandings and feelings about the realities which are of vital and intimate concern to them.

The Vanier Institute also believes that there are many benefits for Canadians as a whole to be derived from seriously addressing the same complex and disturbing issues which are raised in relation to the future of Canada's Northland. The Report also brings into much clearer perspective the dilemmas in the South inherent in trying to develop an increasingly technological economy, while at the same time attempting to move toward a society where rich human relationships and a sense of community are again encouraged and enabled to flourish, in order to provide a more human foundation for our economy as it evolves.

The Vanier Institute, in its recent work on issues of family and the economy, has been concerned to bring into focus once again the fundamental understanding of our economy as having its origin and foundation in familial and community life patterns. Much of the present malaise concerning the state of the modern industrial economy can be understood in terms of the utter neglect, and even denial, of this reality. Helping to stimulate a re-awakening of this basic understanding is one of the benefits that the Berger Report can bestow upon our country as a whole and not just on the North. Clearly we have some critical choices to make as a nation of persons who wish to act more responsibly and justly in the world.

The Vanier Institute urges that we give strong consideration to addressing the severe imbalance in our national economy. For example, it is possible and necessary to reorient our attitudes away from over-consumption and waste toward a conserving ethic and a sense of stewardship. For some, this orientation is already reflected in patterns of "voluntary simplicity" which demonstrate that reducing the amount consumed or possessed need not reduce the quality of living, but rather can provide more satisfying choices and richer life experiences. A more equitable sharing of resources on both a national and a global scale will entail a renewed understanding of what our economy is, so that we may re-order our economic values, goals and priorities in order to liberate the capacities of persons and families to be more self- and community-reliant.

This re-ordering can begin with the rest of us seeking to understand and respect the traditional culture and economy of the Northern native peoples. We have much to learn from them that can help us through the economic transition now underway in the Canadian South and throughout the Western world.

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Nous pourrions fort bien amorcer ce réagencement en essayant de comprendre et de respecter la culture et l'économie traditionnelles des Autochtones du Nord. Ils peuvent nous apprendre beaucoup de choses qui nous aideront à traverser la transition économique déjà commencée dans le Sud de notre pays et dans tout le monde occidental.

L'institut Vanier nous offre l'instamment de chercher à redresser les graves déséquilibres qui entachent notre régime économique national. Ainsi, il est possible et nécessaire de reorienter nos attitudes, de délaisser la consommation excessive et le gaspillage et d'adopter une morale de préservation et de salutaire gestion. Pour certains personnes, cette orientation sera déjà concrétisée dans une "simplicité choisie", et cela montre qu'en réduisant le volume consommé ou possédé, on ne réduit pas nécessairement la qualité de vie, mais qu'en enrichir les expériences de vie et exercer des choix plus satisfaisants. Si l'on veut préparer plus équitablement les ressources à travers le pays et le monde, il faut adopter une nouvelle préception de notre économie afin de réagencer nos valeurs, nos objectifs et nos priorités économiques pour que les personnes et les familles deviennent plus aptes à dépendre d'elles-mêmes et de la communauté.

Dans ses récents travaux sur la famille et l'économie, l'Institut Vanier a tracé d'insister encore une fois sur le fait que notre régime économique repose sur les structures de vie familiale et communautaire. Si l'économie industrielle moderne provoque tant d'inquiétude à l'heure actuelle, c'est qu'en a négligé effrontément cette réalité fondamentale au point même d'en nier l'existence. Si nous aidé à nous éveiller de nouveau à cette vérité fondamentale, le rapport Berger aura profité à tous les Canadiens et non pas seulement à ceux du Nord. Il ne fait pas de doute que les Canadiens doivent faire certains choix extrêmement importants si elles veulent agir avec sérieux et justice dans le monde.

L'institut Vannier croit aussi que tous les Canadiens auraient un avantage à examiner sérieusement les mêmes questions complexes et troublantes que l'on soulève pour l'avvenir du Nord canadien. Le rapport permet aussi de mieux cerner les dilemmes qui surgissent dans le Sud du pays si l'on s'emploie, simultanément, d'une part à mettre au point un régime économique de plus en plus technologique, d'autre part à nous rapprocher d'une société qui favorise de nouveau, au point d'en permettre l'épanouissement, de riches rapports humains et un sentiment de la communauté en vue de créer des fondements plus humains pour l'évolution de notre économie.

En confortant de cette perspective globale, l'enquête sur le pipeline de la vallée du Mackenzie a mis au point des mécanismes de sondage fort différents de ceux des Commissions qui ont eu surtout tendance à s'appuyer sur les témoignages formels, donc forcément limités, des "spécialistes". Le juge Berger a déclaré: "je suis convaincu que les Autochtones du Nord nous ont révélé leurs inquiétudes et leurs craintes les plus troublantes". S'ils ont pu le faire, c'est parce qu'en organisant des séances d'enquête formelles, comme les communautés du Nord l'avaient demandé. On a décidé de ne rien retrancher des témoignages de l'agence arbitrale. L'institut Vanier souhaitait coûter à cette méthode d'enquête publique qui permet aux gens d'exprimer leurs sentiments et d'expliquer comment ils congolivent les réalités vitales qui les entourent et de façon arbitraire.

L'institut Vanier de la famille désire mettre en lumière la nécessité de préserver et consolider le régime économique des Autochtones si l'on veut préserver les valeurs humaines positives de leur culture. Comme le signale le juge Berger, cela ne veut pas dire que les Autochtones veulent dévenir des objets de musée. Certains aspects de la technologie moderne appliqués à l'échelle humaine et adaptés à des cultures congues en fonction de petits groupes revêtent un caractère d'importance primordiale pour la survie de leur économie. Les Denés, les Inuits et les Métis cherchent à s'adapter au monde moderne, mais par des moyens qui ne détruisent pas leur culture, qui ne les forceront pas à être assimilés par la Société des Blançs ni à être relégués en marge de cette Société.

Comme le juge Berger le montre par des exemples, on a mis en place un réseau préfectoral d'échanges de produits alimentaires provenant de la chasse, de la pêche et du piégeage. Dans la société culturelle traditionnelle qui existe encore dans le Nord, les parents ou les amis pourvoient aux besoins alimentaires de ceux qui sont incapables de chasser, de pêcher ou de piéger. Le juge Berger déclare: "La survieance du régime économique des Autochtones a été surtout tributaire de la nature des relations qu'ils entretenaient avec la terre. Aux yeux des Autochtones, la terre est plus qu'une simple source des aliments ou du revenu; c'est la source permanente de leur bien-être physique et psychologique, de leur identité comme peuple." Le mode de vie imposé par l'urbanisation et l'industrialisation a empêché sur ce régime économique axé sur la famille.

DECLARATION DE
L'INSTITUT VANIER DE LA FAMILLE
SUITE A :
LE NORD : TERRE LOINTAINE, TERRE ANCESTRALE
Rapport de l'enquête sur le pipeline de la vallée du Mackenzie

Rapport de l'enquête sur le pipeline de la vallée du Mackenzie

LE NORD: TERRE LOINTAINE, TERRE ANCESTRALE

SUITE A:

L'INSTITUT VANIER DE LA FAMILLE

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